

Seattle Light Rail Review Panel

Meeting Notes for May 15, 2002

Agenda Items

- MLK Corridor Design Development (60%) Briefing
- Focus on MLK Corridor Artwork

Commissioners Present

Tom Bykonen
Matthew Kitchen
Jay Lazerwitz
Jack Mackie
Don Royse

Staff Present

Debora Ashland, Sound Transit
Cheryl Sizov, CityDesign
Kathy A Dockins, CityDesign

LRRP Business

Cheryl reported that we still have not chosen a new Chair. Approval of April 3rd and May 1st meeting notes was deferred; Kathy will send out all minutes from 2002 via e-mail for approval by the Panel members who were at each meeting. Part Two of MLK (individual at-grade stations and artwork detail) will take place 5 June from 3-6 in the ST board room. Cheryl has been working on the MLK Task Force, and hopes the work will give the Panel a fresh look at something that's been in the works for a while. There's currently nothing on the agenda for the 6/19 meeting, so it may be canceled. July is also open, but she asked that the Panel please keep the dates on their calendar in case something came up. In August, we'll be looking at 60% design for McClellan & Beacon Hill Stations.

Debora Ashland reported that ST had received a record of decision from the FTA for the Environmental Assessment approval (NEPA satisfied for initial construction), which is a milestone for Link and paves the way for a full funding grant agreement and letter of no prejudice. Now ST will be moving into the final design stage; approval should come in the next two weeks, which means things will really heat up in Fall of this year.

MLK Corridor Design Development Briefing

Debora Ashland, Sound Transit
Steve Arai, Arai Jackson

Debora began with an overview of the work done by the MLK Task Force. The previous submittal of 60% design work was in Spring of 2001. The work needed to be put on hold while the Link system was evaluated. During that time, civil design work proceeded, and is now at pre-100% so there was a bit of a disconnect between civil and architectural. Time was spent on revising the route; the Board adopted the revised alternative alignment. They identified who would be responsible for station maintenance and which station elements would be used. Arai Jackson worked on revised 60% design. The MLK Task Force was re-engaged, and Shane Dewald was added. The undergrounding decision was just concluded in the last two weeks, so the current design drawings are formulated for both underground and above-ground utilities.

Steve Arai gave an overview from the design standpoint: they have tried to embrace all LRRP decisions (recommendations and guidelines), but it is difficult to present "the whole" piece. The Task Force met four times, breaking the Corridor into basic geographic areas as well as projects for discussion and concurrence

from Task Force members. The one missing piece of the puzzle is community feedback, which they hope to have by June 6th. Pedestrian corridor work will focus on accessibility and safety issues. A lot of the funding is going to sidewalks and curb cuts; not much left for other amenities. Steve then turned the presentation over to Owen Lang from Sasaki Associates for a presentation of Corridor elements.

Owen first provided a "big picture" overview, then focused on (pedestrian and vehicle) travelways, vertical elements, landscaping, etc. A year ago, without complete civil design (e.g. underground or above-ground utilities), it was hard to show a vision for the corridor. Since then, they've come to appreciate how different this corridor will be from how it is now. Owen presented several "Before and After" boards, including residential and commercial conditions before and after the Corridor is complete. The corridor design will be an undulating series of events, presenting an image of a tree-lined street. While there are planting limitations on tree size, there aren't any limits on quantity. The OCS poles will be like furnishings; an element of the hierarchy like graphics and signage.

The **trackway** will be alternating 60' panels with changes in texture. There will be a river rock pattern on the edge, which will help to articulate travelways, giving the Corridor three bands of movement.

Don Royse asked if questions could come at this point or if we should wait until the end; Owen said he would take questions throughout.

- Is the river rock rounded and stamped in concrete? What is its depth? *We're looking at at least an inch depth to the pattern. We want it to appear difficult to walk over, and therefore discourage foot or vehicular traffic. The river rock stops at the pedestrian crossings so people will cross there, and becomes seeded cobble at the emergency crossings to be even more discouraging.*

The sidewalks are 2x2; the crosswalks are 1x1 with a 2' wide banded edge. The crosswalks are darker, and are at either end and at the plazas. The openings at the station areas can have bigger trees and other design elements. The gore areas are not irrigated or maintained; light green on the map signifies areas that can be planted. In residential areas, it will be more of a continuous parkway.

There are three color options for **vertical elements** (the wooden pole represents the possibility of overhead utilities, as the drawings were completed before the undergrounding decision was made): a silvery, light grey color to match non-Sound Transit elements; the "Sound Transit Blue" which could be used on ST elements only; or the "ST Blue" used on all elements to identify the Corridor immediately. The light fixture will be either the standard Cobra or a Kim Structure.

- Is the Kim is more expensive than the Cobra head? *They're comparable; it seems to fall within the pricing criteria. Maintenance would be an issue. We're in negotiations with City Light right now because it's not standard.*

Cheryl requested that the Panel comment on those elements or aspects of design they feel are worth strongly advocating and fighting for, noting this would be most useful to the City and Sound Transit at this time.

- Who is responsible for maintenance? *Sound Transit for ST elements; City Light for City elements; that's why having a non-standard light would be a maintenance issue. CL would have to stock the light we choose.*
- Is the blue in question the blue we've already seen? *Yes.*
- I'm taken by the uniformity of color as an aesthetic choice.
- I agree. If the City doesn't say it's outside what they can do, I'm for it.
- Maintenance at the same level is very important. If ST is repainting every year and the City repaints every five years, it's not going to look good.

ST wants to approach the **tree palette** consistently, using theme trees. 25% will be accent trees. There will be a consistent sprinkling of trees, including trees with a significant canopy and larger evergreens at the station plazas and triangular parcels of land along the corridor. They're identifying tree species with forms, and growing requirements that fit the conditions of the corridor planting areas. There will be some variation from cluster to cluster of trees.

- I favor the overall uniform treatment with 25% that varies. What is the relationship between evergreen and deciduous? *The triangles are the focus for evergreens. Maple may be the staple, with some purple-leaf plums. We don't want a monoculture.*
- I'm taken by the notion of a great street – I agree with Don.

There are also three options for the retaining walls: if it's under three feet, it will be a rockery; three to ten feet will be cantilevered; and over ten feet (there are three: Hudson, Juneau, and Henderson) will be modular. They're trying to come up with something that's modular but interesting. There will always be some level of landscaping, but there's no irrigation, so it's a challenge. They're trying to express linearity. It clarifies the directional of the wall to the Corridor.

- Is the pattern in the same plane? *Yes, it will be smooth or sandblasted fossil(?).* My tendency is toward something simpler, but the stair-stepping pattern is more appealing. It breaks up the "tall wall" effectively.
- It's difficult to comment without the context of the hillside. The top one seems overly busy.
- I'd like something in between; not so frenetic.
- Something horizontal, with planter pockets? *There are maintenance concerns w/planter pockets – who will maintain the upper planter?*
- The zigzag is arbitrary here, but if it's done with planting, it would make sense.
- I want to see the panel with the variety of trees. Is that the variety that's intended? Will the colors be that different? *They are different on the drawing to indicate a different species, not necessarily a different color.*
- The trees in one planting strip ought to be the same, but varied throughout the Corridor. If every tree is different, it's too "staccato-y."
- So there will be trees/landscaping in the triangles, planting strips and plazas only? *Landscape elements for each station will be seen at the next meeting; it varies from station to station. Henderson will have landscaping between the tracks, but probably no trees.*
- Do we need to think about priorities for the Corridor? We're at 60%; are there decisions yet to be made? Will this come back to us again, or will there be more trade-offs down the road? Will budget concerns have an impact? Last time there was uncertainty about whether the design would hold together. *It's always helpful to know your priorities. We're working on the cost estimate right now, but all the work you've seen today is within budget. If certain things don't happen (like painting the City poles, etc), that unused money will go forward. You're looking at a complete package today, not a menu. The most important things for you to make decisions on right now are tree species, color, and poles/light fixtures.*
- How much of the Corridor will actually have underground utilities? Maybe the outcome of this discussion will change depending on above- or below-ground utilities. *The cost estimate is for McClellan to just south of Barton to be undergrounded. Further south, utilities will be overhead. Continuously underground? 'Til Henderson, then looking closely at where they'll stop.*
- Okay, so I'd say that a high priority is the integrated design for vertical elements.
- I agree completely.
- Yes!
- Is there an additional cost with that 60-foot tracking variation? What about a differentiation just at each station? If there's a substantial cost difference, I can do without having variation every 60 feet as long as the stations have variation.

- Why are there alternating bands? How does that fit into the whole concept? *We're trying to treat tracking as a visual/architectural/safety feature, and break up the pavement like a snakeskin.*
- This is stamped concrete? *Yes, with a broom finish on the inside vs exposed aggregate on the outside. We used alternating textures because we have to at the emergency vehicle crossings, and we want it to occur as part of the whole thing.*
- The street meets the track at the intersection? *Yes. That's a good solution to channel traffic – if you're heading toward color as an option, please try to do so!*
- Yes, use color – texture too, if it's not too expensive. *The hand-laid and pre-fab cobble was too expensive, which is why we went for the stamped concrete.*

Cheryl points out that some have to leave early, so should we propose an action now? Don says that strong opinions have been registered, which could be the basis for an action. Jay has a preference for color and asks if there is an opportunity (with the stamping) to create a special mold. If it's not going to look like rock, then let's take it in another direction! Jack suggests that an action be taken by the folks who were here from the beginning (he arrived later). The stamp issue can't be a part of the action, but Jay has a good point: if it's custom anyway, what about fabric patterns from different cultures, maybe that weave together?

Focus on MLK Corridor Artwork

Carol Valenta, Sound Transit

Norie Sato, Sound Transit

Gale McCall, Artist

Overview

Norie presented boards of planned artwork at Edmunds, Othello, and Henderson stations, reiterating that each piece addresses culture in one way or another, and that there is a connection between pieces at different stations. Some pieces will look at the connection directly, and others metaphorically.

The art nodes are centered around various stations, so we will see how the artwork is integrated into the stations themselves as well as the plazas. The plan is to have artwork in other areas along the Corridor, too, as partnerships develop with other entities. The first layer of work includes system-wide elements, the idea of a "cultural conversation," and how the artists are looking at those issues.

The Edmunds station will feature a giant shovel by Victoria Fuller; Othello features a Roger Shimomura piece with old culture trappings that's more about cultural assimilation; and Buster Simpson's "Clattering Bowls" piece is the focus at Henderson. While the theme is constant, there is a variety of expression throughout.

The system-wide OCS poles frame the "cultural conversation." There are so many poles, ST wants to keep it simple, so they are planning to use colored bands of paint on the poles as they approach the stations. The poles that are closer together (10') will have metal "quilts" between them; ST hopes to get the communities to help design them.

Darlene Nguyen-Ely's large "dragonfly" piece will be at Henderson. The bowls at Henderson and the shovel at Edmunds create a connection by having tall elements at either end of the Corridor.

- Does Darlene's piece move? Could it move with wind? What is the link between the shovel and the bowls? What will Buster do with the rainwater that collects in his piece? I think this is a really encouraging sign. This is a unique corridor and the scale is right. Go with it! Maybe we could use one of these pieces as the design for the concrete stamp. *When the station areas are presented next week, you'll see them again; this is just an overview. The exception is that Gale McCall is here to talk about her piece at Edmunds Station.*
- Can we briefly talk about all of the pieces on your boards? *Sure, let's start with Edmunds.*

Lions are featured all over the Valley (the "ubiquitous lion"), so we want to take lions from different cultures, and use them as gatekeepers at various locations; a gatekeeper for Columbia City and Edmunds Station. Eugene Pernell's piece is composed of units of measure ("measuring sticks") from inches to hands (horse measurement) and so on.

Othello Station has a more Asian flavor. The Brian Goldbloom piece works with rainwater, using carved basins and a water path for it to drain away from the canopy. The braid at Othello will relate to the smaller braids at each station, which represent tactile wayfinding. The large Othello braid will have metaphoric objects held inside to relate it to its smaller counterparts.

- Will the budget handle all of this? *Yes. We are reserving some of the money for other stuff along the way. This is a base, and we hope to commission more work in 2005.*
- I'm encouraged by the artwork, and I want to thank Carol and Norie for pushing the art and artists.

Art Nodes (Edmunds, Othello, Henderson)

Artist Gale McCall discussed her artwork which will be integrated into Edmunds Station. Her pieces consist of baskets and two giant magnifying glasses. There will be four large baskets (gathering vessels), two at either end of the station, mounted on river rock pedestal (to evoke the residential, the fireplace, and the hearth). The baskets will have lights inside them (light will glow from within the baskets). There is a possible sight-line problem, so they may have to be moved back a little.

The magnifying glasses, a "relic from the garden," are a metaphor for exploring life, and will be located on either side of the station. There will be no plastic or plexiglass lens; instead, there will be elaborate metalwork incorporating many different symbolic images. She also has ideas for plants in the planters where the magnifying glasses are located.

At this point, Cheryl asked what the Panel members thought – she had worked with Barbara Goldstein on Alki, and they had a lot of stuff spread out over six miles. Is there enough stuff, or too much?

- It's a matter of scale. Along Alki, those pieces are the total experience. I'm interested in the basket. How does the light work/shine out, and is there a top or lid on it? *It could have a top. That has been a question. It's intended to be ambient light, and I'd like some color, too. We're still trying to work on that for liability and other reasons. A lid could keep the light contained more.*
- I like the light idea but I don't know about maintenance. If they let six out of ten bulbs burn out before replacing them, it might not be worth it. We should find a simple solution or let it go. It should be able to live without the light.

The Edmunds and Henderson pedestrian corridors are not shown. We've set aside monies for something, probably banners. There isn't a lot of right-of-way to do much else. The community has expressed interest; they have a banner project going on already.

The "nodes" concept comes from the director of SEED. We can't cover the whole Corridor, so we are focusing on the stations. We're not committing all of our art budget; we are saving some for the future. The artists aren't commissioned for the final design yet. We're far enough along to include the artwork in the construction documents, but that's it.

- When will we see the next round, with plinths and footing? *July or August. We'd like your thoughts on river rock vs. brick. 730 & 740 will be split when civil design is at 90%.*

- It's tough to say when we're not seeing it in context. *Well, this will be coming back on June 5, so you can see it then. We just have Gale here today because it fit into her schedule. You can see the individual station documents at that meeting.*
- We'll see it in the individual station presentations – good. You know, there is a lot of stuff at the station entrances. I think it's okay if they have to move the baskets down. *We need to present this to the Rainier Valley community – do you have any suggestions?*
- I'm confused about where things will be located, so if you could make that clear . . . *(Norie points out the shovel)*
- I'm encouraged by the flatness and how it's broken up by vertical elements and other pieces. The scale pleases and surprises.
- In answer to your question about suggestions for the Rainier Valley presentation, I'd focus on location. These drawings aren't lacking, as long as they are descriptive enough to get to the next stage. Maybe if you had models of some pieces . . . and make sure Buster addresses the rainwater issue. Investigate having Darlene's piece move. Is there an approval or action needed? *All of this is coming back on the 5th, so it can wait until then.*
- I think it should go on record that we have seen and approved the Corridor as a whole, and that we are in agreement with the current status and direction. (moved and seconded)
- I'd like to see the artwork incorporated into the Vertical Elements drawings.

Action

The Panel thanked Sound Transit and consultants for the presentation; noted that it was clear a lot of hard work had gone into the design since last year; and moved to recommend approval of the design as presented, with particular support for:

- *The concept of alternating bands of texture for the trackway, including adding color if feasible—although if cost is prohibitive then conserve resources by only providing the alternating bands at station areas;*
- *Application of a single color—preferably blue—for City and Sound Transit vertical elements and otherwise creating an integrated design feature out of them as much as possible; and*
- *The art concepts as a whole with appreciation for the scale of many of the pieces, notwithstanding additional development and refinement of specific pieces.*

The Panel further requested additional work on the following items prior to final design and 90% review:

- *Resolution of maintenance responsibilities such as to demonstrate a comparable level and quality of maintenance between City and Sound Transit for the corridor over time; the intent being to ensure that the corridor "wears well" and evenly over time;*
- *Consideration of a special mold or stamp other than river rock for the trackway header, perhaps with input from the SStart team for a design that fits within the "Culture Conversation" theme of corridor artwork;*
- *A balance between too much variety and too little in the selection of street tree species, preferably with each individual "clump" of trees being composed of primarily one species with one accent tree. The Panel understands the desire not to create a monoculture, but believes that too much diversity within each clump or segment of trees will present a distracting and confusing design. Additional work to create a pleasing rhythm and variety of tree forms, leaf color and pattern while still allowing for some consistency should be done;*
- *Addressing rainwater in the Buster Simpson artworks; specifically looking at how rainwater will collect or move through the "bowls" and whether this can be a design feature;*
- *Incorporating movement into the Darlene Nguyen-Ely artwork;*

- *More consideration of a light being emitted from the Gayle McCall “baskets”—whether the intent is to illuminate the basket itself or shine light to the surroundings, and discussion of how the lighting would be maintained and by whom;*
- *Incorporation of artwork into the drawing showing vertical elements, with the intent of showing the relationship between both; and*
- *Development of another design for the retaining wall that is between the two designs presented today—simpler than the 1st one and shown in context with plantings.*

The meeting adjourned at 5:30 pm.